About Growth

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Providing financial and technical resources to build livable and sustainable communities

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Design review: How it's being used

By Shane Hope, AICP
Managing Director, Growth Management Program, OCD

Many communities are using "design review" to help make sure that proposed developments will meet the local objectives for public space, greenery, historic preservation, walkability, neighborhood fit, and other values. They administer design review in different ways.

Design review is an extra step that local governments may require before approving a project. Often, it's applied only to certain types of development, such as multifamily housing, or to projects in certain areas, a historic district, for example.

The guidelines indicate local objectives, principles, and options for the design of sites or buildings. They often include sketches or other graphic illustrations to help explain ideas. While vaguely written or hard-to-use guidelines can cause confusion, clearly written guidelines help everyone understand what's expected up front.

A developer considers the design guidelines when preparing a proposal. Before submitting it, he or she may also meet with the local review authority to clarify any issues. After the proposal is submitted, the reviewer determines whether overall it meets the local objectives, expressed through the guidelines. Typically, the reviewer's approval is necessary before the project can proceed.

In Olympia, design review helps the city get buildings that complement neighborhoods and fit with what the community wants in development. PHOTO / RITA R. ROBISON

In the design review process, certain decisions are subject to design guidelines or standards. (While the term "guidelines" might seem to imply a more flexible approach than "standards," that's not necessarily the case. Local governments vary in how they use these terms. In this article, the term guidelines will be used to mean either guidelines or standards.)

Design review allows communities to deal with issues that can't be handled well through the normal regulatory process. For example, the maximum allowed height of a building can easily be specified in a zoning regulation. But how a new building should fit with the existing neighborhood is more difficult to specify. That's where design review comes in. The

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ABOUT GROWTH

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Design for growing communities

By Shane Hope, AICP
Managing Director, Growth Management Program, OCD

Design makes a big difference in how development shapes and blends with a growing community. Projects that are designed well receive greater acceptance. Communities that are designed well help neighborhoods grow gracefully.

Both urban design and building design affect how people use space and how comfortable they will be as the community grows.

For example, suppose 100 new residences are being built in an existing neighborhood. If the development has been designed with respect for its surroundings, as well as the project needs, it will fit with the rest of the neighborhood or even make it better. It's likely to work well for the new residents, too.

If the development isn't well designed, for example, if it blocks all other neighborhood views, looks like a fortress, and interrupts a major bike route, it will be resented by the neighbors and lower the quality of living there.

What is urban design really? I like the following, rather formal, definition: "an approach for organizing components of the built environment to achieve a unified, functional, and enjoyable neighborhood or community." A less formal way of describing urban design is to call it: "the art of arranging physical spaces, especially those spaces in the public domain, to satisfy community needs."

Urban design issues include how buildings relate to the street, where car parking is located, how and where a public park is laid out, and what views should be preserved.

Building design focuses on architectural characteristics, such as the materials to be used and the "style" of a building. Building design issues that affect the surrounding neighborhood are often considered to be part of the larger subject – urban design.

To a great extent, building design is within the realm of the developer. However, certain aspects of it have community impacts and may be addressed through local design codes. For instance, a community that wants to preserve its historic character may adopt a design code requiring the renovation of important historic buildings to be consistent with the original architecture.

Washington's communities are using design to help ensure that downtown is pleasant and convenient for both businesses and shoppers. They've found that urban design approaches, like tree-lined streets and glass-fronted shops built along the sidewalk, can help create an attractive, walker-friendly downtown.

In rural towns and villages, thoughtful design can help retain the local ambience and rural feeling, for example, by making new buildings compatible with old ones.

Design can help to:

- Make new development easier for neighbors to accept.
- Raise or protect property values.
- Create interesting and useful public spaces.
- Make walking and bicycling pleasant and convenient.
- Increase neighborhood safety and comfort.
- Enable communities to establish or keep their own special character.

Attention to design is more than considering aesthetics. Design strongly influences both how a community looks and how well it works.

It doesn't have to be expensive. The key is deciding first what the objectives and priorities are for developing (or redeveloping) an area, then considering the local conditions and using design techniques that will help achieve the intended results.

Urban design is by no means a cure for all problems of growth and change. But when combined with good planning and adequate infrastructure, it's an important tool that can help growing communities become even better places.

Upcoming historic preservation workshop

The Washington State Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation will conduct a "Tax Incentives for Historic Rehabilitation" workshop on June 28 and 29 in Seattle.

Contact Stephen Mathison at 360-407-0768 for details or e-mail StephenM@cted.wa.gov.

Community links design review, historic preservation

By Teresa Brum
Historic Preservation Officer, City of Spokane/Spokane County

Spokane's visual appearance – streets, new buildings, suburban developments, historic buildings, established neighborhoods, and boulevards – is important to Spokane citizens. Those who took part in the City of Spokane's recent comprehensive plan update were concerned that as new development occurs, traditional community character could be neglected or sacrificed, resulting in a decline in livability and quality of life.

The update brought to light that the city lacked coordination between design review for historic buildings and historic districts and design review for new construction or redevelopment in other areas of the city. People voiced concern that these two activities aren't separate functions, but that it's essential to connect them so that preservation and design can be carried out more effectively.

One citizen, reflecting on the connection, said "I like a diversity of architecture, a city with variety on the streets. I don't like to throw things of quality away." Another said that what's important is "maintaining Spokane's 'comfortable feel' – its size, neighborhoods, friendliness, small town feel in a big city."

Coordinating design review and project review for historic properties is helpful when historic buildings, such as the Hotel Lusso, are renovated.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF SPOKANE

In response, Spokane combined the two topics in its new comprehensive plan to create an Urban Design and Historic Preservation chapter. Historic Preservation is Goal 13 of the Growth Management Act (GMA). Although urban design is not mentioned directly in the goals, it helps address other GMA goals. Design is important in accomplishing goals 1 and 2 of reducing sprawl and encouraging development in urban areas. Spokane's Urban Design and Historic Preservation chapter addresses individual goals for design and preservation, as well as joint goals and policies for qualities such as pride and identity, downtown center viability, and neighborhood qualities.

Before the creation of the combined chapter, the City of Spokane had design review and historic preservation boards, each separately staffed. To improve implementation, a board position was created on the Spokane Design Review Committee for a Historic Landmarks Commission member, ensuring communication between the two committees.

The Design Review Committee follows design guidelines developed specifically for Spokane, while the Historic Landmarks Commission follows *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. The authority of the two boards is different.

- The Design Review Committee acts in an advisory role, developing guidelines, reviewing projects, and making recommendations to the city that has approval authority for specific classes of projects.
- The Historic Landmarks Commission reviews properties on the Spokane Register of Historic Places and lack of compliance can cause a property to be delisted. Delisting could cause a property to lose special valuation tax incentive, a locally implemented property tax reduction for rehabilitated buildings.

Looking to the future, preservation and design are tremendous opportunities for managing growth in Spokane, with the new tool of a combined design/preservation planning to guide our progress.

Using design review to protect historic properties

By Gregory A. Griffith, AICP
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, OCD
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Design review and design guidelines are recognized as key to an ongoing, locally controlled strategy to protect a community's historic properties.

Since the earliest historic preservation ordinances were enacted in the 1930s, preservationists have advocated for and, indeed, have been implementing design review at the local level.

Local preservation review boards soon recognized that protection of historic resources required more than wall plaques and good will. They discovered that by reviewing proposed changes to historic properties they could manage historic resources without owning them. It wasn't long, however, before legal challenges to design review taught preservationists that their decisions needed to be based on guidelines that could be applied fairly to property owners.

The model for historic preservation design review is *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, developed by the U.S. National Park Service. These rehabilitation standards are a common sense approach to adapting historic properties to contemporary use while protecting their historic character.

Standard 9 recommends new construction and additions "...be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment." This standard underscores the effect that new construction has not only on adjacent historic properties, but also on streetscapes, neighborhoods, and entire communities.

In Washington, many local governments are using these standards as a foundation for writing local design guidelines. They're using design review and design guidelines to protect historic properties.

For cities and counties considering developing guidelines for historic preservation, here are a few tips:

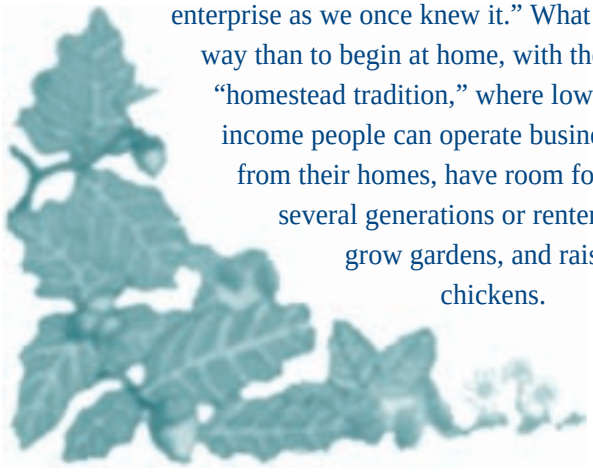
- Utilize the services of a qualified design specialist. Make sure the specialist is familiar with and understands *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*.
- Design guidelines should acknowledge your community's history and its resulting architectural character.
- One size does not fit all. Design guidelines should reflect the unique character of your community.

Affordable housing design and the homestead tradition

By Michael Pyatok, FAIA
Principal, Pyatok Associates

When we discuss improving the design of our nation's affordable housing, it's time we move beyond just the issues of good site planning and architectural character that fit local neighborhood conditions.

We need to address the real economic needs of people who are in the bottom economic quarter. If we truly yearn for self-sufficiency and the "end of welfare as we know it," then as a nation we should reassert our traditions of self-help and self-determination and "free enterprise as we once knew it." What better way than to begin at home, with the "homestead tradition," where lower-income people can operate businesses from their homes, have room for several generations or renters, grow gardens, and raise chickens.



Changing demographics creates residential competition

Recent census data shows a resurgence in the popularity of city living, with a 9 percent increase in inner city population during the 1990s. This is partly the result of surging foreign immigration, particularly from Spanish-speaking countries. Also, some of the offspring of those who previously fled to suburbia are returning to the city, along with some of the original deserters who are now empty nesters.

The younger ex-suburban population returning to the city to live and work, armed with advanced degrees appropriate to the new economy, is earning far more than did their parents' generation. But the new immigrants have arrived at a time when the manufacturing sector, one of this country's traditional ladders to economic achievement, is at an all time low because of robotics and the ongoing industrial flight to the Third World's cheaper labor. Service jobs are the main type of employment open to them.

In large cities across the country, the wide income gap between dot.comers and service workers has profoundly affected inner city real estate markets, exacerbating the plight of all lower-income urban populations, not just immigrants. What results is an imbalanced competition for inner city urban geography.

At the same time, the more recent generation of suburbanites is more educated than those who fled cities after World War II. A new social mix also is changing American suburbs since many more jobs are now located there, encouraging service workers and immigrants to seek affordable housing closer to their jobs. This new social reality also presents challenges for everyone trying to satisfy a full range of incomes in the suburbs.

Physical and political challenges

These are some changes to zoning regulations, design guidelines, and lending policies that could help create a wider mix of incomes and diminish displacement in both cities and suburbs.

- **URBAN ZONING.** A greater mix of live-work functions (other than just home offices that rely on computers and art production) needs to be allowed in traditional residential communities. We shouldn't forget that during the first 200 years of this country's history people used their homes as "homesteads" and "shop

houses." Home-based occupations that include light manufacturing activities and manual labor should be allowed in many urban areas to help lower-income populations augment their incomes.

● **DESIGN GUIDELINES.** Too often, modern residential design guidelines extol the virtues of domestic architectural styles developed in the early part of last century by those who had the luxury to separate "living" from working. However, sanitized homogenous conditions don't allow lower-income households to engage in income producing activities. The reintroduction of alleys into old or new neighborhoods would provide an opportunity for residents to use the alleys to serve home businesses, no matter how messy, while still maintaining manicured front yards to please neighbors.

● **LENDING POLICIES.** How much can be borrowed to construct or purchase housing depends on the gatekeepers to credit: real estate appraisers. Appraisers today see no value in supplying unfinished attics or basements. Unless these spaces are finished and ready for occupancy on completion of construction, they'll not be factored into the value of a proposed design.

Providing these spaces could be accommodated, if construction loans and mortgages recognized their value. They historically provided families with the flexibility to earn income either from home-based enterprises, ancillary units, or in-law roomers.

● **ATTITUDES IN THE REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY.** Many developers are not typically prone to innovate – so much is personally at risk if they miscalculate their market niche. And property managers of rental projects live in a very real world of insurance requirements and ever-present awareness of operating and replacement costs if damage occurs due to non-residential uses.

The various concerns about allowing business opportunities in residential areas are understandable. But, if we attune solely to these concerns, we're not supporting family-based entrepreneurial capitalism. The American traditions of our colonial and pioneer ancestors should be available to those who must find multiple sources of income to improve their economic stability.

Michael Pyatok is a practicing architect and professor of architectural design. His practice serves non-profit organizations and private developers in building affordable housing. Since opening his office in 1985, Pyatok has designed more than 5,000 units of affordable housing for lower-income households, winning numerous local and national design awards. These included projects in Seattle, New York City, the Bay Area, West Hollywood, San Diego, and Alaska.

Gateway Commons' 17-unit townhouses in Emeryville, Calif., for low-income, first-time homebuyers are live-work units – street level storefronts with living space above.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL PYATOK

Design from the past brings rave reviews

By Rita R. Robison
Editor, *About Growth*

If you live in a "garagescape" home like a lot of people, where the car and garage dominate the front of the house, you may have viewed with interest neighborhoods that are returning to designs of yesteryear – homes with front porches and garages located in alleys behind the houses.

Called neotraditional, this design philosophy's objective is to create a strong sense of community by incorporating features of traditional small towns. New neotraditional neighborhoods are drawing attention and positive response throughout Washington.

Lynden

In Lynden, near the Canadian border, Greenfield Village looks much like a neighborhood that might have been built at the turn of the last century, according to Mark Hinshaw in his book, *Citistate Seattle: Shaping a Modern Metropolis*.

"The neighborhood includes a small park and the streets are as serene as any suburban subdivision," said Hinshaw. "The developer built these terrific little gems by following a 'pattern book' of houses that was published about a hundred years ago." Hinshaw added that Greenfield Village was so well received in the marketplace that the company built more of the "new-traditional" neighborhoods in Ferndale, Burlington, and Oak Harbor.

Seattle

In the Holly Park Revitalization Project, the HOPE VI project is replacing 893 units of public housing with 1,200 units of new, mixed-income housing. (In 1992, Congress established the HOPE VI program, under which many large-scale public housing projects are being torn down and replaced by smaller, low-rise, scattered-site projects.)

"The goal of this major project in Southeast Seattle is to create a mixed-income community," said Alan Justad, spokesman for the Seattle Department of Design, Construction, and Land Use. Holly Park provides units for sale at market rate, lower-middle income rental units with a purchase option, and subsidized public housing.

Justad said that a strong neotraditional design has created a community-oriented neighborhood. Townhouses, not apartments, are laid out in a neotraditional site plan. Reduced street widths create single lanes of traffic and encourage the use of streets for recreation. Individual open space is provided for each unit and front setbacks have been reduced to bring units closer together. Classic front porches encourage outside activity and connection with others.

Justad added that the siting was arranged to preserve significant stands of trees and individual large trees, with streets and sidewalks wrapped around them and parks created to incorporate them.

Langley

The Langley Third Street Cottages Project features eight detached, one bedroom-plus loft cottages grouped around a garden courtyard with detached parking.

Jack Lynch, Langley's city planning official, said that the owner-occupied cottages are the first to use the city's new zoning code provision that allows cottage housing at 12 units per acre in all single-family residential zones. They are built on four combined single-family lots (totaling 29,000 square feet). City regulations limit the ground floor area to a maximum of 800 square feet and the total square feet to 975. Units are grouped around a usable common area and screened common parking area (1.25 spaces per unit).

Cottages are beneficial because they address a need for increased density in the city, expand the range of housing types, enhance the sense of community-within-the-community, and introduce environmentally friendly housing by using less building material.

Cottage design features include a combination of public and private spaces, front porches, a central commons that provides greenspace and an area that residents can watch over for safety, and individuality (four cottage designs, a mix of colors, and individual garden landscapes and flower box gardens).

CONTINUED NEXT COLUMN.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE

A strong neotraditional design is creating a community-oriented neighborhood in Seattle's redeveloped Holly Park.

Langley Cottages address a need for increased density in the city and expand the range of housing types.

PHOTO / ROSS CHAPIN

Lynch said that the eight units sold within a few months of being completed and several have re-sold. The occupants are primarily single persons and couples.

The Langley Third Street Cottages Project received a Highest Honor Award in the 1999-2000 American Institute of Architecture/Sunset Magazine Western Homes Awards program.

For more information on the project, see www.cottagecompany.com.

Design review: How it's being used

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process allows an authorized reviewer to have some flexibility in deciding whether a proposal will achieve what the community wants or how it can be improved.

Local governments usually authorize one person or entity to be the reviewer and make decisions. In some communities, the person appointed is the municipal planning director, with assistance from staff. In others, an appointed design review board, composed of several community members, does the job.

A key advantage of having design review as an administrative (i.e., staff) function is that it's generally faster for the developer than going through a board. On the other hand, a design review board may be better suited or have more time to make certain kinds of judgment calls.

Because each method has its advantages, some local governments choose a hybrid approach, having an administrative review process for certain kinds of proposals and a design review board for other kinds. *Design Review Approach of Five Local Governments* (below) shows the approaches being used by five cities in the Puget Sound region.

Administration of design review varies from community to community, depending on local circumstances. For it to work well, the process must be reasonably fast, fair, and understandable. It must also be based on design principles that reflect community values. When that happens, design review helps satisfy the community and at the same time allows projects to get built.

Design Review Approach of Five Local Governments

City	Review by Staff	Review by Board	Hybrid Approach*
Bellevue	●		
Langley		●	
Olympia			●
Redmond			●
Seattle			●

* Hybrid: Some design review by staff, and some by board.

Help on the way for capital facilities planning

Having trouble meeting the capital facilities planning (CFP) requirements of the GMA? Feeling overwhelmed by the rules and requirements for public works projects? Looking for one place where you'll find all the capital project technical information, financial information, and data you need?

OCD's Growth Management Program is offering counties, cities, and special purpose districts the opportunity to test and further refine a new CFP model for use by interested jurisdictions statewide. Up to 12 local governments are being selected to receive a disk that contains the electronic tools, along with instructional materials and technical assistance from OCD.

OCD sought applications from interested local governments. The nominations are being evaluated on the following criteria: geographical distribution (of selected sites), type and size of the local government, readiness to proceed, and multijurisdictional submissions.

Over the past two years, the City of Olympia developed a series of electronic tools and templates that create a streamlined, standardized process for CFP called eNCOMPASS. These tools, primarily in Excel 97, include customizable step-by-step task lists for CFP preparation and document production as well as public works project management for transportation, water, sewer, or stormwater projects.

For more information or to schedule a demonstration in your area, call Alice Soulek at 360-725-3064 or e-mail alices@cted.wa.gov.

7-day, 24-hour hotline for environmental complaints

In response to citizen concerns that the most serious environmental violations can occur during weekends or off-hours, the King County Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES) activated a new hotline recently that operates 24-hours a day, 7-days per week. By calling 888-437-4771, citizens can expect immediate, on-site visits by DDES code enforcement staff for the most serious environmental violations, even if they occur during weekends or off-hours.

Examples include:

- Logging without permits or logging in sensitive areas.
- Clearing or grading without a permit.
- Clearing or grading without proper erosion and sediment controls.
- Using machinery in wetlands, streams, or buffer areas.
- Safety hazards such as unstable slopes or open manhole covers on development sites.

DDES, working with the King County Department of Transportation (DOT), trained staff at a pre-existing DOT hotline on the environmental complaints anticipated and how to distinguish between emergency situations requiring immediate staff dispatch and those that could be handled the following business day.

The Environmental Complaint Hotline is enhancing the stewardship of unincorporated King County's natural environment. To date, about 50 calls have been placed to the hotline, with half being serious enough to require an immediate site visit. Ten of these visits have resulted in immediate stop-work orders.

Well-designed development near transit stations adds to compact urban centers

By Anne Vernez Moudon, Professor
University of Washington
School of Architecture and Urban Design

Transit-oriented development is being embraced in Washington as an approach to development that supports transit and builds lively urban places. The approach works well with commuter trains, light rail, or buses and takes many design forms, whether the scale is a site, neighborhood, or district. The combination of shops, homes, and transit attracts people, and residents find that they no longer depend as much on their cars.

Development around transit hubs is not new. Its characteristics are evident in areas developed before the automobile, including the many neighborhoods in urban areas that grew along and around streetcar lines and are now served by bus transit.

After World War II, however, emphasis on automobile transport allowed development to spread. Distances between activities increased considerably, making transit travel ineffective. As a result, transit malls and park-and-ride facilities in areas of dispersed growth have, for decades now, been the only places with direct links to transit.

Today, park-and-ride facilities are being revisited as places for transit-oriented development. Bob Cervero, an urban and transportation planner at the University of California at Berkeley, calls this second generation of park-and-rides, the "walk-and-rides." The first park-and-ride turned walk-and-ride in our region is the much-acclaimed Overlake development in Redmond.

Transit-oriented development and walk-and-rides are the backbone of a successful future transportation system. They are, along with the region's designated urban centers, an integral part of our plans to allocate future growth to transit-friendly areas. Dozens of jurisdictions are considering them and working to attract growth to these locations.

Transit-oriented development and walk-and-rides are areas of compact development. They highlight the benefits of density. Densely developed areas allow us to preserve resource land at the edge of our urban regions. They make it financially possible to attract services that cater to nearby residents.

Mixed uses (retail or offices with living units above or nearby) reduce distances between activities: the grocery store is a block away and so are the local restaurant, drugstore, and other shops. In mixed-use areas, the air is cleaner and the streets less congested because densely settled people use their cars less. (We know that urban residents travel half the vehicle miles of suburbanites; also, on average, households living in multifamily housing make 30 percent fewer auto trips than residents in single-family houses.)

Finally, transit-oriented developments provide opportunities for affordable housing (in locations that had been considered undesirable) and for sustainable housing (land is serviced with sewer, water, electricity, and telephones).

Two issues need to be addressed for transit-oriented development in our state.

First, as compact and mixed-use areas, transit-oriented developments require careful planning and urban design. Buildings need to be placed and designed so they don't cast shadows on usable outdoor space; they must be constructed so that noise and odors are contained or eliminated. Streets must be friendly to both vehicles and people. In transit-oriented development design, the car isn't removed but no longer dominates public open space. The pedestrian and the cyclist must feel safe and comfortable in a transit-oriented development.

Second, we need to identify areas that have transit-oriented-development-like characteristics. While current transportation policies highlight places around rail and bus transfer stations as potential areas for transit-oriented development, many other areas in both urban and suburban parts of our urban regions could become hubs.

Each jurisdiction needs to carefully evaluate its development patterns and make it a priority to serve its densest areas with pedestrian-supportive infrastructure, transit, retail, recreation, and institutional services. We need to become skilled at "growing" transit-oriented development in as many locations as we can.

Washington State Office of Community Development

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